

Supportive Services for Veteran Families

Overview - Revised Homeless Prevention Screening Tool 2021

Context

The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program provides services that assist very low income Veterans who are at-risk of or are experiencing literal homelessness by providing a range of supportive services and financial assistance designed to facilitate safe, sustainable housing solutions. SSVF's core concepts include a commitment to Housing First practices, ensuring client choice and service orientation, responding to housing crises using trauma-informed, crisis-oriented interventions, and ensuring services are provided as-needed and in a progressive, individualized manner.

Homelessness Prevention Overview

Homelessness and housing instability can cause significant stress and effects similar to other traumatic experiences. Many Veterans facing homelessness have also experienced other trauma related to their military service and/or other personal situations. Consequently, SSVF services are grounded in basic principles and practices consistent with evidence-based, trauma-informed care, such as establishing a welcoming, safe space and being explicit about the purpose of screening and why certain questions are being asked.

Homelessness prevention service are not the same as eviction prevention – SSVF aims to identify those Veterans who will become literally homeless (i.e., will need shelter or transitional housing to avoid being unsheltered) within the next month “but for” SSVF assistance, even if that assistance is only focused on coordinating other resources or mediating landlord/familial relationships. At minimum, SSVF grantees assist any Veteran seeking housing assistance with immediate, trauma-informed engagement, screening, and basic housing problem-solving support, and help to access other assistance to address housing needs from SSVF and/or other VA and community resources.

Revised Homelessness Prevention Screening Tool

The revised SSVF Homelessness Prevention (HP) Screening tool went into effect on October 1, 2021. The new tool accounts for new and promising practices and research that promote a holistic, Veteran centered approach to engaging Veterans who face a housing crisis and exploring options to assist households in avoiding literal homelessness. The goal of the updated HP Screening Tool is to document the screening process and eligibility for Veterans applying for homelessness prevention assistance and to help target limited financial resources most effectively. The revised tool and companion guidance were developed with the support of a working group comprised of representatives from the VA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, SSVF grantees, persons with lived expertise, researchers, and technical assistance providers.

The SSVF HP Screening Tool is used by SSVF staff to determine and document whether a Veteran household applying for SSVF homelessness prevention assistance: 1) Is an eligible Veteran household that is within SSVF's income limits and is at imminent risk of homelessness, including Veterans who have the potential to rapidly resolve their housing crisis through housing problem solving strategies and other flexible Rapid Resolution assistance (“Stage 1”); and 2) Is prioritized for more targeted Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) from SSVF that may be needed as part of more extensive homelessness prevention assistance, based on available grantee and community resources (“Stage 2”).

The HP Screening Tool ensures consistent screening across SSVF grantees aligned with SSVF program requirements and priorities. Grantee staff should use the tool to document initial screening to determine Veteran eligibility and should keep the completed form in Veteran client files, along with other supporting documentation. The HP Screening Tool is only used for initial screening and is not an assessment tool or conversation guide. SSVF Staff are strongly discouraged from reading the questions/prompts verbatim to Veterans. Instead, staff should use trauma-informed initial engagement and screening strategies, briefly described below, and use the tool to support initial eligibility determinations before engaging in deeper assessment, housing problem-solving, and/or other SSVF assistance as indicated.

For more information, including access to the revised HP Screening Tool and other companion guidance, please visit the [SSVF Website](#) under “Homelessness Prevention” or email SSVF@va.gov.